

## Residential Automobile and Boat Washing

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Automobile washing is one of the most common residential activities that pollutes surface water, streams, creeks, lakes, and Puget Sound. In addition to soap and dirt, vehicle wash water carries oil, grease, solvents, nutrients, and metals and to our local water bodies. The soaps and detergents that we use to wash automobiles can be more of a pollution threat than the grime washed off the automobiles. Even soaps that are labeled "biodegradable", "environmentally friendly" or "nontoxic" are harmful to aquatic life and water quality. The "nontoxic" label simply means the soap is less toxic to the user.

### **RECOMMENDED BMPS**

**The following BMPs, or equivalent measures, methods or practices are strongly recommended if you engage in automobile or boat washing at your home.**

**1**

It is acceptable to rinse down the body of a vehicle/boat with just water without doing any wash water BMPs.

**2**





If you wash your automobile or boat using mild detergents (pH neutral) on an area that allows for infiltration of the wash water, such as gravel, grass, or loose soil, it is acceptable to let the wash water infiltrate as long as you only wash the body of the vehicle (i.e. not the undercarriage or engine).

**3**

If you wash on a paved area such as your driveway and use soaps or other cleansers, you should do ONE of the following:

- Redirect the wash water to vegetated areas such as landscaping or your lawn. This can be accomplished by using temporary measures such as a berm, boom/socks, or other solid materials like a piece of lumber placed at the low point of where your vehicle is parked. This will direct the flow of water to your lawn or landscaping.
- Use a wet vacuum to collect the wash water and then dispose of the wash water to your sink or toilet for treatment at your local sewage treatment plant.

### **OTHER OPTIONS AND TIPS**

-  1 Take your vehicle to a commercial car wash where wash water is recycled and discharged to the sanitary sewer. This also reduces the amount of water used for vehicle washing.
-  2 Use a hose nozzle with a trigger and shut it off when you're not using it to conserve water.
-  3 Never clean or pressure wash the engine or undercarriage of your automobile at home. The oil, grease, and other pollutants from this activity can contaminate your property, as well as groundwater such as shallow aquifers. This is especially important in areas where wells provide potable water. For this type of cleaning, take the vehicle to a commercial car wash where wash water will be treated appropriately.
-  4 There are several waterless car wash products on the market. These products are designed to clean and protect your vehicle without using water.

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For more information or assistance in implementing these best management practices, contact the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks Water and Land Resources Division at 206-296-1900.

Reader Note: The County may require the above recommended BMPs in situations where the County determines that the discharge of wash water, whether singly or in combination with other discharges, is causing significant contamination of surface and storm water or ground water.